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AUTHOR Zajda, Joseph
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ABSTRACT

In post-Communist Russia, schools have become the site where a new culture and morality will be formed. With the collapse of the rigidly controlled Russian school system, a new paradigm must be created to guide education. To many, a political and ethical void exists in Russian schools. Until 1988, schools in the Soviet Union operated under a single educational program that was often subjected to the periodic reforms of new leaders. In the post-Communist era, it is clear that educational change was needed at all levels. Differentiation in school curricula was adopted, and arts, humanities, and social and physical sciences are being given more attention. The 1992 reform legislation "The Law on Education" encompassed some of these changes. The law stresses the humanistic character of education, common human values, freedom in human development, and citizenship. Pluralism and democracy in educational management and the autonomy of educational institutions are also emphasized. Another document, "The Basic Curriculum of the General Secondary School," reinforces the same changes and stresses choice in curriculum. Under these changes, new attitudes and beliefs about economics, business, and history are also forming. (Contains 12 references.) (JPT)

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SCHOOL CURRICULUM REFORMS FOR THE NEW VALUES IN POST COMMUNIST RUSSIA

Joseph Zajda

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SCHOOL CURRICULUM REFORMS FOR THE NEW VALUES IN POST COMMUNIST RUSSIA

Joseph Zajda

Australian Catholic University

ABSTRACT

This paper considers school curriculum reforms in post-communist Russiain terms of the attempts to use them as a means of introducing new values and priorities: the entrepreneurial self in the market economy; the belief in religion; the development of critical thinking; pluralism and a global perspective and the preparation for the world of business and the market economy currently replacing state-controlled economic planning or command economy under communism.

In the era of cataclysmic restructuring sweeping Russia, particularly since the failed August 1991 coup, the Russian school can be seen as a site of a contested culture and morality. With the abandonment of the Marxist-Leninist ethic after 1991, the Russian school, which formerly played a central role in shaping the moral development of pupils, is now the arena of violently competing economic, social and political influences. In the present "frontier-style" society which has developed in Russia, with its aggressive and sometimes exploitative drive towards privatisation and the market economy and a neglect of individual needs and rights, there is a desperate search for a new paradigm in schooling for the world of the year 2000.

Economic and political instability in Russia reinforced the notion of society in flux and one suffering enormous and dramatic economic and social dislocation. A rigid politico-ethical system which defined the moral dimension of schooling and the desirable patterns of social life has been replaced with what amounts to almost a moral vacuum. As one senior Russian scholar commented sadly, "People are forced by circumstances to lower themselves to do things they would never have even considered in the past". In his view

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most people would sell anything to make ends meet in the current climate. The lines of people selling their second hand goods outside the major rail stations are often 15 deep and extend for hundreds of metres. Hard currency prostitution is a new way of life for many students and the list goes on...

Under the Soviet system, the school was viewed as the organic cradle of Soviet society in evolution. A collectivist Marxist-Leninist belief system, even if many viewed it as mere rhetoric, certainly provided the necessary glue for society, to use Durkheim's analogy for social cohesion. The dissolution of the Communist Party, the demise of the Komsomol and a radical *depoliticisation*, (to use the Russian neologism), of schools and other institutions had left a yawning rent in the social fabric.

I visited schools in Moscow during the Winters of 1989, 1991, 1992 and December/January 1992/93 as part of my research into the sociology of schooling in Russia. My impressions, of course are applicable to this time, and Russia is in a state of constant change. I was able to interview principals, teachers and students in a selected number of schools in Moscow and spent a considerable amount of time in classrooms observing day to day teaching. I was also able to meet and interview with the then Minister of Education, Eduard Dneprov in January 1992 and the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Higher Education, Professor Vladimir Shadrikov. Because I have been through the Soviet education system as a boy until the age of thirteen (in the western Ukrainian city of Ivano-Frankivsk, I was in the interesting position of being at once an outsider, as an Australian of thirty years, and also an insider having been part of the Soviet system. In many ways, the Russian classrooms and pupils in the junior school level

at least, were just as I remembered them.

Until 1988 schools in the Soviet Union worked according to a single program of *upbringing* and schooling. The process of the introduction of *the reform law to end all reform laws* was a familiar one in the Soviet Union. Education, although *monolithic* in government and content, was the site of each successive leader's newly sweeping broom or innovative drive and effort to set his stamp on the system. This routine, which became an 'old story', began at least as far back as *Khruschev's 1958* poly-technical and vocational education reform, which was designed to reduce social inequality, to solve the problem of the supply of skilled workers and to solve the problem of a perceived rising *elitism*. The *1977 educational reform* was characterised by the unresolved contradiction between the academic excellence fostered by the *post-1966 curriculum* reform (under Brezhnev) and the growing tide of efficiency oriented vocationalism (Zajda, 1991). The *1984 reform* also emphasised the need to improve the *quality* of education, the upbringing process and labour training. It also introduced the new structure of compulsory secondary, technical and vocational technical education. Like the 1992 Reform, emphasis was placed on parity of knowledge with other advanced countries. New courses were introduced in this reform which included the Principles of Information Science and Computer Technology. The reform also introduced the study of the Ethics and Psychology of family life (sex education or human relations) as well as Aesthetics and Ethics.

The previous history of the curriculum changes makes one feel that the recent developments (1985 onwards) had firm roots in unresolved problems of the past which can be summed up in the following way. First, it was hoped that it would be possible to

change one part (or one level) of the education system while leaving the others intact. It is now clear that related changes would need to be made at *all* levels (from preschool to post-university education). Second, the idea of differentiation of school curricula was adopted. Many Russian educators now firmly reject the standardised curriculum of the past, with its absolute equality of opportunity slogan. Third, the bias towards sciences has via differentiation as students can now specialise in arts, humanities, social sciences or the physical sciences. It is believed that an added emphasis on the humanities will result in what is perceived as a much needed values education. Fourth, the vocational component of the curriculum does not automatically alter either the labour market or the pupils' attitude to work. Simply including more "classes of labour and vocational training" or similar simplistic solutions did have the opposite effect eg. the failure of the Khruschev's 1958 reform aiming at bridging education and labour. I reminisced recently with a Russian boot maker in St Kilda about our shared memories of collecting what was called the Coloradski Zhuk (or Colorado Beetles) which attacked the potato crops. These were collected in huge piles and then burnt by "armies" of school children (Pioneer detachments and Komsomol brigades). We were cold, hungry, tired and covered in mud and if anything, such work experience only reinforced our desire to avoid the fields if possible. I sought refuge in my books (and he obviously in a trade). Fifth, many Russian educators believe that the *quality* of education cannot be improved in already overcrowded schools with overworked, underpaid staff. The student work load (in terms of number of subjects and hours -approx 10 major disciplines at the final year level) creates a nightmare for students. A recent postcard to my son from a Russian friend revealed that the 16 year old girl had entered this nightmare last September and "now I have to work a lot, every night I study for ten hours". Throughout the history of educational reforms in Russia there has always been a

small core of public values, namely quality, efficiency and equity to which later was added freedom.

Although it has some distinct echoes of its many predecessors, the *1992 Reform* known as *The Law on Education* claimed to encapsulate and legitimate the spirit of *perestroika* in Russian schools. A lengthy document of some 60 pages, with 58 Articles or clauses, divided into six parts, purported to define, among other things, the significance of the following educational principles, *equity, quality* and *accountability*. In its introductory paragraph education was defined as a 'process of instruction and upbringing of the interests of the *individual, society* and the state. The newly redefined principles of the politics of schooling, a revision of Dneprov's short-lived 1991 *Educational Manifesto*, are impressive at first sight and included:

1. The humanistic character of education and the priority of common human values, the freedom in human development, education for citizenship and love of the Motherland.
2. Freedom and pluralism in education.
3. The democratic nature of educational management and the autonomy of educational institutions.

Among the 58 Articles one finds seemingly innovative concepts. Firstly, Article 7, 'The State Education', introduced the idea of a minimal standards of competency: the so-called state-standard of education obligatory for all educational institutions- a compulsory minimum of core educational programs. Article 14 describes the defining principles or rationale which should govern the content of education. They include the integration of the identity of the individual in the system of global and national cultures and the realisation

of the importance of the self and its development. The level of knowledge should be equivalent to the contemporary world standards and understandings. More radical is Article 49, which states that individuals who have been disadvantaged by low quality education have a right to take legal action against the educational institution and demand compensation through government channels.

In contrast to these provisions, the document contained some less emancipatory arrangements for education. In a move out of step with world trends towards complete secondary schooling, Article 19, Paragraph 6 has actually *shortened* the length of compulsory schooling from 11 years to 9 years. It is now possible for pupils as young as 14 to leave school with parental permission. One writer in *Uchitelskaya Gazeta* (4 May, 1993) dubbed it the 'back-to-front reform', taking the education system to early twentieth century levels. Paragraph 7 of the document legitimizes the expulsion of "deviant" pupils from the age of 14. From a system which provided free education for all, alternatives are now permitted, including partly paid or fully fee paying private schooling. The core curriculum once compulsory for all has now been replaced with the possibility of alternative curricula, provided that the standard core of studies defined by the state is maintained. The traditional pastoral care role offered by the youth organisations in the schools has been replaced the easy way out: the so-called "deviant" is expelled. The new dimensions of the 1992 reform may guarantee freedom and diversity of schooling, set minimal competency standards and give autonomy and certain rights to individual students, the prevailing emphasis on the individual's ultimate responsibility for his or her fate. The right to choose also brings the responsibility for the choice. The reform has aspects wherein the state is beginning to shift responsibility to the individual in the name

of freedom and autonomy. One commentator notes that already 200,000 semi-educated teenagers become street children where many are inducted into criminal activities. For example, in 1990 alone, some 224,000 crimes were committed by minors, which was two and half times higher than the figures in 1970 (Malkova, 1993).

Those reforms in the *Law* which enshrine pluralism and allow freedom of choice in schooling and thereby diversity, have dark side. They introduce to Russia for the first time in nearly seventy years, the spectre of inequality. Of course there was some covert inequality in schooling in the Soviet Union but this opening for *officially allowed difference and inequality*, is particularly dangerous in the Russian situation, where very suddenly great extremes of wealth and poverty have emerged in a volatile political climate. The guaranteed minimum offered by the state in education is in danger of becoming a very second rate and inadequate provision, while the private alternatives develop and flourish. An education system which once offered a excellent level of education to all citizens, to the envy and disquiet of rival Cold War powers (eg the US and Sputnik initiated educational panic for reform directed towards excellence, particularly in Science and Mathematics, (the essential subjects for technological progress) during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Such reforms, directly or indirectly also coincided with the introduction of the market oriented culture, where the "market" and the priorities of business become the new cultural imperatives. A new orthodoxy has been born during the change to a market economy, which is just as harshly, if more informally enforced as the dogmas of communism.

The new entrepreneurial culture has a new cultural hero: the successful "fast-track, high-flying" business man. In some areas there is little pity for the weak or those unable to

cope. Although many Russians **are** involved in the work of replacing the welfare provisions offered by many work places under the former system with new welfare structures, but a surprisingly large number of educated people expressed views which amounted to a form of *Social Darwinism*, or broadly speaking a survival of the fittest in society in a society ruled by global market forces. For many, the *market* is seen as a *natural* condition of social life and its "judgements" are the best and fairest ones. "If they are poor, why don't they work harder?" one woman sociologist asked us.

The reform also emphasises the importance of the preparation for the global market economy which is already influencing youth and their attitudes to education, training and their future careers. According to the wording of *Law on Education* the school curriculum was going to be introduced by the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation or at least corresponding to parliament after it has been tried out in practice for *five years* on a probationary basis. Then once every ten years the curriculum is to be renewed and revised on a competitive basis, where educators would be asked to submit their design for various innovative and more effective curricula.

The latest document of significance in the education reform process is *The Basic Curriculum of the General Secondary School*, (Basic Teaching Program), approved by the Ministry of Education in March 1993, which was to be introduced from the beginning of the 1993-94 school year. It reinforces much of the thrust of the *Law on Education*. There is a further renewed emphasis on the humanities, in some levels up to two thirds of the program. The element of choice is emphasised by the continuation of inclusion of electives, divided into two groups, *compulsory*! electives and optional electives. These can

potentially increase the proportion of the curriculum devoted to the humanities. The document also contains, in appendix, examples of actual school curricula covering primary and secondary schooling which teachers and schools can use as models if they wish. It is a general practice that some sort of a religious education is given on an elective basis as well as some philosophy and business education.

Like the rest of the society, most schools are undergoing a massive program of re-educating and re-working of consciousness. I found that in 1992-93 some of the schools I visited had self-consciously tried to introduce religious themes during the Christmas season. They were anxious that we observe and photograph the religious representations decorating the classrooms just before schools broke up for the winter holidays late in December. At one large Moscow school, where we had visited the lyceum, the principal made a special point of inviting us to see the final Christmas play staged by grade one pupils. Although tired after a long day seeing many classes, we felt obliged to wait for the 6 pm performance. The Christmas Pageant was complete, with carefully elaborate and richly dressed Wise Kings, a Mary and Joseph, shepherds dressed in their families' old furs and somewhere, Snegurochka (the Snow Maiden), a traditional Russian New Year character, with Dyed Moroz, or Father Frost, worked into to the story. The children were starry-eyed and very touching, the teachers anxious, proud and watchful, the crowd of parents and grandparents squeezed onto tiny benches (and also the visitors) suitably misty-eyed. The children, like their counterparts the world over, were touchingly involved. The principal turned to us and quoted from Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* the line which reflects on the innocence and spontaneity of children, from which we adults can learn.

History classes are now the location of massive reinterpretation and questioning, with many teachers floundering to prepare courses without textbooks which have not been able to be prepared in time. In any event, pluralism has replaced totalitarianism, paradoxically, almost becoming an orthodoxy in itself. Senior students are becoming cynical. *Pravda? Pravda!* "Truth? Truth!", proclaimed the headings on the photo display on the wall of the history classroom in School Number 235 in Moscow. The captions under the photos referred to "*Our gulags*" etc. Is this yet another renunciation of the past that we have grown accustomed to on this 1993 visit to Moscow? A further public revision of history: more rejection of the immediate Soviet past and rediscovery of either a much maligned tsarist legacy or old religion or folk customs? More of the recanting and revivalism that threatens to rival only commodity advertising in the domination of public discourse? Fortunately not on this occasion. Rather the eleventh class have used cut-out newspaper headlines to parody this collective public soul searching now being conducted in the Russian media and to humorously caption what on closer inspection turn out to be the photos of their class camp.!

At least they appear to have some degree of critical awareness of the often painful process of public re-education taking place around them. It is a process that has shaken the very foundations of the society which at least in public rhetoric, used to espouse a collectivist ideal, whose older citizens were proud of its position in the world and its multicultural nature and a society which honoured its war heroes and its "heroes" of labour. It is a process that has left many older members of the population either shocked or cynical and disillusioned, now wondering if they have been somehow duped in the past. It has also profoundly disrupted the lives and future career paths of many of the present generation of

youth. Many Russian educators perceive the growth of a pronounced conflict between the generations which, in the words of one school principal, has involved youth "Learning that everything their parents had been taught to value and work for was 'lies'". This information "has given youth the upper hand". More in pity than anger he claimed of Russian youth, "they have no clear values except contempt for the past".

Admiration for "businessmeni", Russia's new "cultural heroes", has interrupted the career plans of many Russian school leavers. Several of the principals of schools we visited this year claimed that although the pressure was still strong among their pupils to complete secondary school with good results, far fewer of the final year grade 11 class were continuing on to higher education. The attraction was "business", but not for some the kind of business career which would interest the most able among western youth. The rapidity of the change to a market economy has certainly brought many employment opportunities to Russian young people. It is in many areas still a market economy of the most primitive kind with almost "medieval" collections of street hawkers, dealers and kiosks or pre-fabricated roadside stalls. The young people can often earn a hundred times more than their university educated, professional parents, but in often in jobs in the bedraggled strings of road side kiosks which cluster around every metro station, and bus depot- the market economy at its most rudimentary with protection rackets, etc. "Business" in these settings means selling a motley collection of new and second hand clothing and goods, imported liquor and perfumes or cheap adulterated homemade copies of the same and odd items taken for sale "on commission" or even stolen. There are also many jobs in the hotel, service and hospitality industry, especially for those who speak foreign languages.

An enormous task have been thrust on the Russian school, which after all has experienced *democratisation, humanisation, differentiation, de-centralisation, integration, regionalisation* and more chillingly, *depoliticisation.* Today the Russian school has been asked to do the almost impossible and one needs to be reminded that schools alone cannot produce desirable social and ethical outcomes:

> Teachers are alone and defenceless in regard to penetration into schools of the pathology of the larger society that schools are called upon to repudiate and remediate. Yet they are expected to produce moral citizens. It is time for us to recognise that healthy societies have healthy schools. To call upon schools alone to produce a healthy nation is to engage in fraud. And fraud is immoral. (Goodlad, 1992:87-97)

An article in *Uchitelskaya Gazeta,* (6 July 1993: 8) is headed *Businessman..is the person in-the-know.....and capable of making money.* That is how they regard business in School Number 101, where according to the article, the pupils try to emulate this example in practice in their Business Studies Centre. Students are encouraged to work in small businesses nearby and earn some money. Their studies cover accountancy, bookkeeping and management. The article notes that is interesting that it is the *school*, not the local *commercial kiosks* which provide the necessary training in business management: that the school *"carefully and lovingly nurtures the seedlings of the new way in the souls of the children-new economic thinking, new attitudes towards life and society and towards the new future of Russia".*

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